

# New Archaeology at Ancient Scetis

## *Surveys and Initial Excavations at the Monastery of St. John the Little in Wādī al-Naṭrūn*

+ YALE MONASTIC ARCHAEOLOGY PROJECT +

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In May of 2006 the Yale Monastic Archaeology Project (YMAP) initiated surveys and excavations at a site in Wādī al-Naṭrūn, Egypt, traditionally identified as the Monastery of St. John the Little. John the Little—known in Greek as Ἰωάννης Κολοβός—was a fourth-century monk of famously short stature whose reputation for ascetic piety was commemorated in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*) and in the dedication of this monastic foundation to his name. In late antiquity, the area where he settled was known as Scetis (Gr. Σκήτις; Copt. ⲩⲛⲏⲣ), a

prominent center of early Christian monastic practice. After the conquest of ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ (641) the area was called Wādī Ḥabīb and later became known more commonly as Wādī al-Naṭrūn, designated by its rich supply of natron, which is still a prominent resource there.

The Monastery of St. John the Little flourished into the late medieval period, after which time it fell into disuse. Located approximately 3 kilometers southeast of the still-active Monastery of St. Bishoi, the John the Little site comprises an area of 265 hectares, including around eighty archaeological mounds (*akwām*; sg. *kūm*)

► The Yale Monastic Archaeology Project (YMAP) is a collaborative endeavor organized under the leadership of Stephen J. Davis (executive director) and Darlene Brooks Hedstrom (director of excavations). Additional team members for the 2006 and 2007 seasons included Dawn McCormack (field director and surveyor), Gillian Pyke (ceramicist and painted plaster specialist), Muhammad Khalifa (asst. ceramicist and field archaeologist), Barbara Emmel (registrar), Tomasz Herbich (geophysical surveyor), Artur Buszek (asst. geophysical surveyor), Jakub Ordutowski (asst. geophysical surveyor), Emily Cocke (area supervisor and field archaeologist), Chrysi Kotsifou (field archaeologist), Christine Luckritz Marquis (field archaeologist), Paul Dilley (field archaeologist), Fouad Shaker (field archaeologist), Nicole Kettleshake (field archaeologist), Erin Gorman (field archaeologist), Trinity Rufus (field archaeologist), Mark Brooks Hedstrom (systems

manager), and Jennifer Smith Davis (house manager). The glass and bone finds were studied by specialists Marie-Dominique Nenna and Salima Ikram in 2009. In 2010, Dawn McCormack completed her survey work with the assistance of Elizabeth Davidson and Sean Urrutia.

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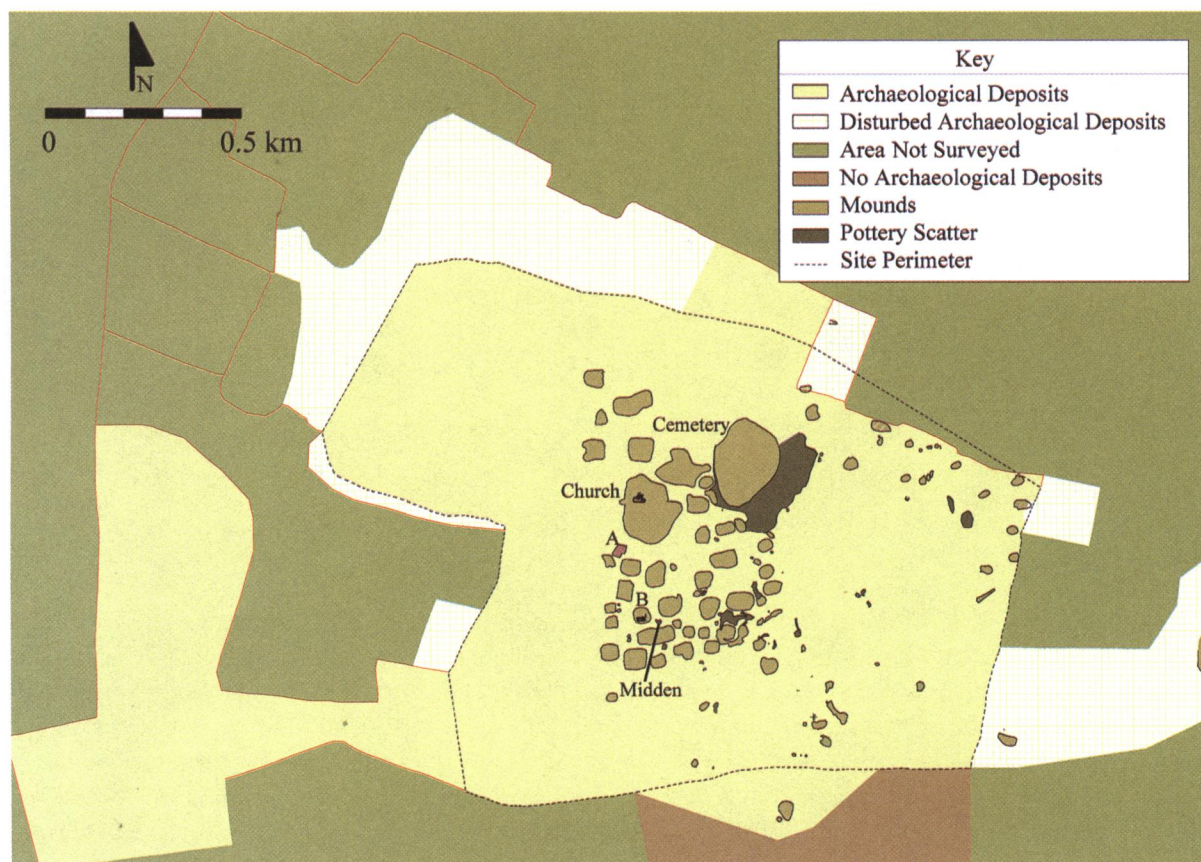


FIG. 1. General plan of the Monastery of St. John the Little. Survey and mapping by Dawn McCormack. Labeled remains from north to south: cemetery mound (as yet unexcavated); church (excavated by the Scriptorium team in the 1990s); A = monastic residence A (excavated by the Scriptorium team in the 1990s); B = monastic residence B (excavated by YMAP beginning in 2007); midden (excavated by YMAP in 2006).

that indicate monastic structures beneath the surface. The survey map published here (fig. 1) shows all of the extant mounds on-site, including prominent features such as the central church and cemetery.

Based upon an analysis of ceramic surface scatter, there is preliminary material evidence for settlement at the site from around the sixth century to the thirteenth century C.E. Surface and subsurface surveys have detected remains of various building types ranging from large-scale edifices (including a central church and complex domestic structures) to smaller monastic dwellings (Copt. *μα νωδιε*; Ar. *manshūbiya*, pl. *manshūbiyāt*).

The site, protected under the auspices of the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) since 1983, includes not only the Monastery of St. John the Little but also the remains of two other settlements

traditionally identified with the Monastery of John Kamē and the Monastery of the Armenians, both defunct by the late medieval period. The archaeological zone consists of a relatively level desert plain dotted with sizable *akwām* and localized pottery scatters. The largest *kūm* marks the site of a large stone and mud-brick church (348 m<sup>2</sup>) and associated buildings surrounded by an enclosure wall. Abutting the external side of the south enclosure wall is a rectangular structure, around 85 meters in length, the function of which is currently unknown; characteristics of its construction and building materials suggest that it is of later date than the enclosure wall.

Previous archaeological work at this location has been fairly limited. In the 1920s, Hugh G. Evelyn-White, working on behalf of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, produced a basic hand-drawn map

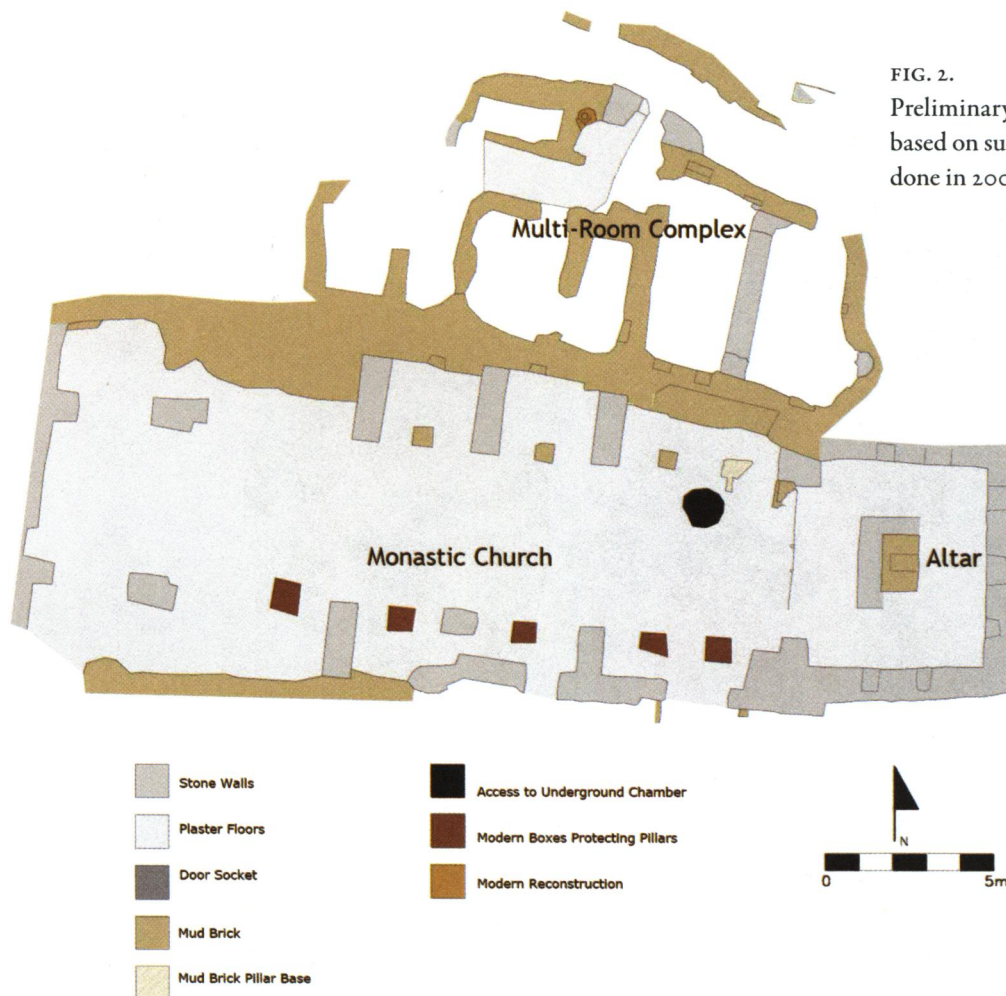


FIG. 2.  
Preliminary plan of the church,  
based on survey and clearing work  
done in 2006 and 2007.

of the site; however, his plan has since proven unreliable in some of its details.<sup>1</sup> In the late 1980s and early 1990s, an SCA team conducted excavations at the so-called Monastery of the Armenians, but their results were never published. In 1995, 1996, and 1999, a privately funded American team from the now-defunct Scriptorium Center for Christian Antiquities (Grand Rapids, Michigan) completed three seasons of excavations at the Monastery of St. John the Little, during which they uncovered the main monastic church, a complex of rooms immediately to the north of the church, and a separate multiroom monastic dwelling

approximately 120 meters to the south (A on fig. 1). The Scriptorium team partially excavated these structures; however, they never conducted a full survey of the site, nor did they systematically publish the results of their work.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, one important component of the YMAP mission is the careful recording and documentation of these previously excavated finds. This work began in 2006 with our preliminary survey of the church (fig. 2).

1 H. G. Evelyn-White, *The Monasteries of the Wadi 'n Natrûn* (New York, 1933; repr., 1973), 3; plate lxxix. Evelyn-White incorrectly locates the Monastery of St. John the Little on this map by locating it west (rather than east) of the Monastery of John Kamê: see O. Toussoun, *Étude sur le Wadi Natroun, ses moines, et ses couvents* (Alexandria, 1931), 32–33.

2 Peter Grossmann and Bishop Samuel (who were not part of the Scriptorium team) documented the remains of the main church and a monastic residence excavated by the Scriptorium team in a short paper titled “Researches in the Laura of John Kolobos (Wādī al-Natrûn),” in *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und christlicher Zeit: Akten des 6. Internationalen Koptologenkongresses, Münster 20.–26. Juli 1996* (Wiesbaden, 1999), 360–64; see also Grossmann’s early discussion of this monastery in his article, “Zur Datierung der ersten Kirchenbauten in der Sketis,” *BZ* 90 (1997): 367–95.



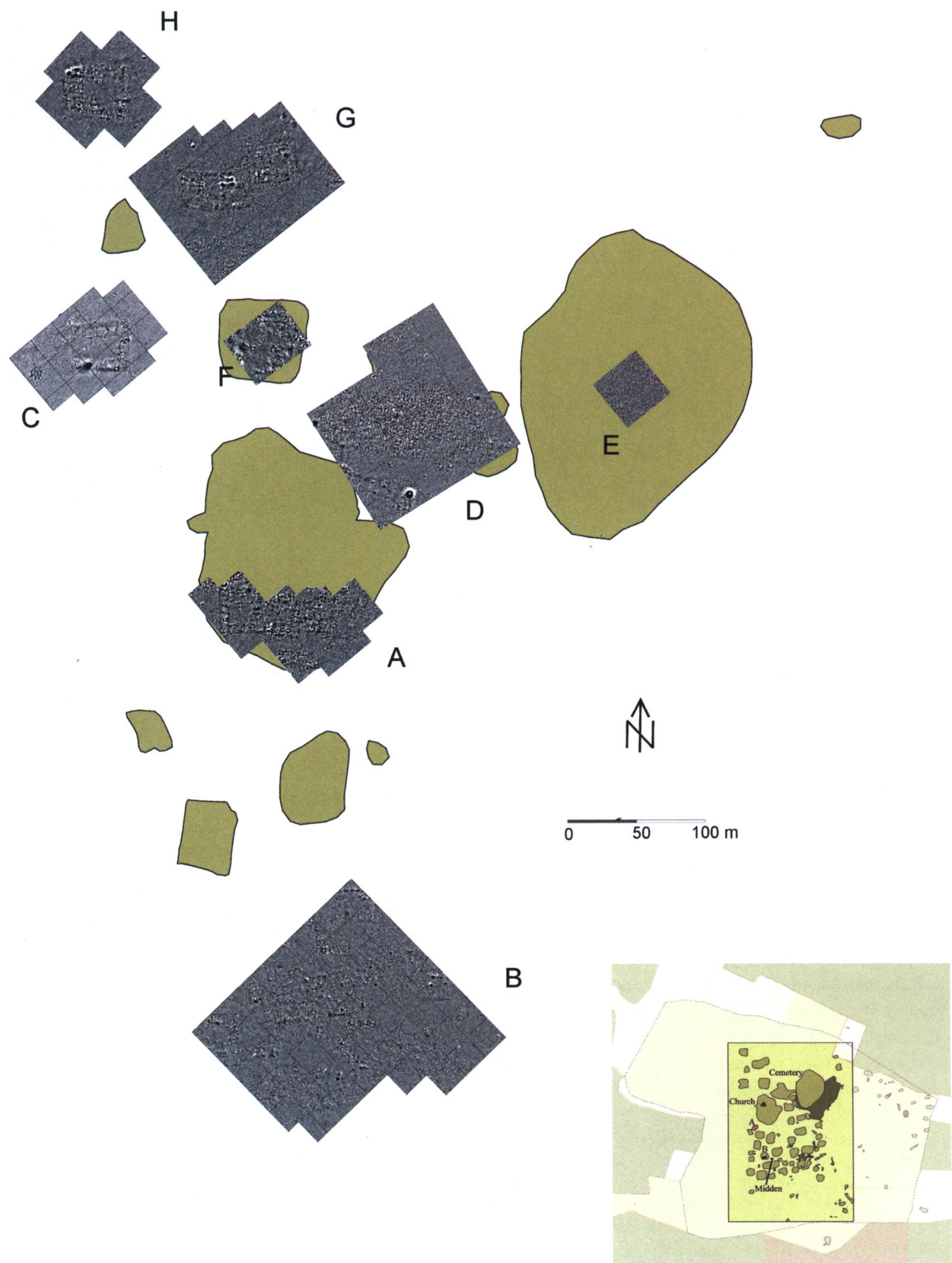


FIG. 3. Geophysical map showing the extent of the areas (A–H) surveyed through magnetic prospection. The inset map above shows the location of the survey within the general site plan (figure 1). Survey and mapping by Tomasz Herbich.

AREA A. The prospection was carried out in the area of a building, traces of which are visible to the south of the enclosure wall of the Monastery of St. John the Little. The southern and western edges of the building appear distinctly on the magnetic map; the structure was apparently 85 m long from east to west. The northern extent of the building could not be traced.

AREA B. The area covered by the prospection includes the remains of a few features of very different size (from ca. 90 × 30 m to 5 × 5 m). Although the map has contributed relatively little new information to what could be interpreted from the ground remains, it clearly shows a complex in the western corner that is scarcely evident in the field. A few possible ovens, furnaces, or kilns were also recorded.

AREA C. The outer wall of a building is preserved as a bank of earth, 2 meters high, in the northeastern corner of the prospected area. Measurements provided grounds for mapping the internal layout of the structure: rooms opening onto a central courtyard along three of the outer walls.

AREA D. Large quantities of pottery covered the area to be prospected, so measurements could not trace the layout of particular buildings. The survey was able to demonstrate only the extent of the area showing magnetic disturbances. The considerable amplitude of values (and surface traces in the form

of ashes and gravel) suggests that the area was used for industrial purposes. An oval anomaly 7 meters across in the southern corner of the area corresponded to an oven or kiln (the top of which is visible on the ground).

AREA E. Surface remains suggest the presence of a cemetery in this area. No structures were detected by the survey.

AREA F. Magnetic measurements were applied to the upper parts of a mound that had risen around the remains of what was mainly a stone structure. The outer walls of this building appear on the magnetic map. The outline of a building in the southeastern corner of the complex was traced.

AREA G. The survey traced the outer walls of two buildings joined at the corners, preserved as banks of earth of different height, up to 3 meters. The internal layout of the conjoined buildings, completely invisible on the ground surface, was reconstructed based on the magnetic results. A complex of possible ovens, furnaces, or kilns was also recorded.

AREA H. Surface traces in the form of low banks of stone rubble give an approximate outline of the building preserved in this area. The magnetic map provided data for the reconstruction of the internal layout of this structure.

The present report focuses on surveys completed during our first five seasons (2006–2010), as well as on excavations during our first season (2006). Subsequent excavation work will be the subject of a future publication.

### Archaeological and Geophysical Surveys

Given the lack of any prior comprehensive mapping of the remains at the Monastery of St. John the Little, one of YMAP's main goals is to produce a detailed site plan. To this end, beginning in 2006, a series of surface and subsurface surveys was initiated to guide future research design and to assess potential excavation areas.

The site is unique in providing an opportunity to examine site development and landscape design of a known monastic settlement founded in late antiquity and abandoned during the later medieval period. Because of the lack of any subsequent reoccupation or reuse, we have an archaeologically rich site for reconstructing the economic and social history of the residences at the Monastery of John the Little and its associated communities.

The surface survey component has had three main objectives. The first objective was to create a master map of the site onto which we might plot all mounds and other archaeological remains visible on the surface over the next several years. The map published here (fig. 1), produced by surveyor Dawn McCormack, represents the result of five seasons of work, from 2006 to 2010. The second objective was to produce a comprehensive topographical map for the site. To this end, a two-person staff mapped the *akwām* under investigation in 2007 by sampling an area of 135 by 135 meters. This work is ongoing and will continue in future seasons. The third objective has been to document surface architectural and archaeological remains. To this end, Gillian Pyke did an extensive surface survey of ceramic materials in 2006, and in 2010 did selected test surveys ranging from architectural elements to small finds such as pottery and glass. In the future, we hope to use this data to help us document patterns of domestic habitation, intra-site movement (e.g., pathways or roads), and trash disposal.<sup>3</sup>

3 For late antique syncretical studies see J. H. F. Dijkstra, *Philae*

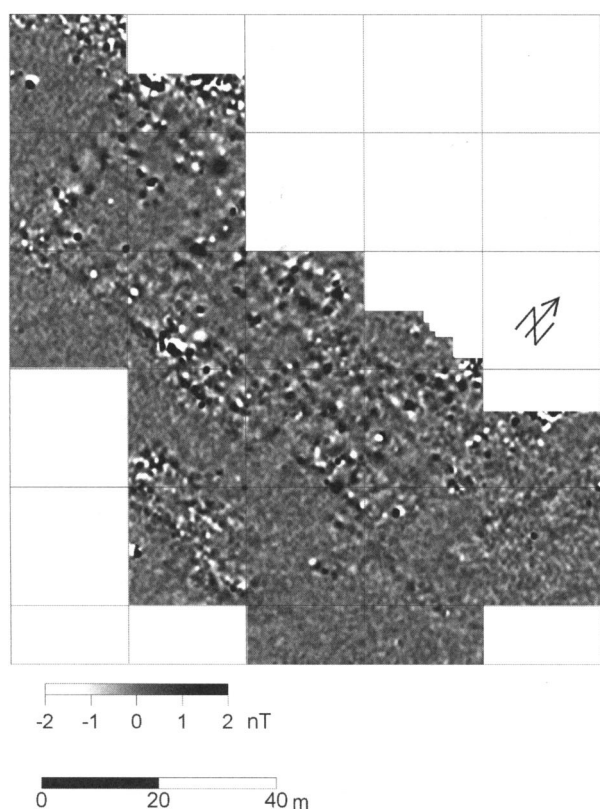


FIG. 4. Geophysical map, detail of figure 3, area A.

YMAP also sponsored a subsurface (geophysical) survey under the direction of Tomasz Herbich.<sup>4</sup> In 2006, magnetic prospection was carried out in eight different areas within the site, covering a total of 6.86 hectares (68,600 m<sup>2</sup>), or approximately 2% of the site area. Two fluxgate Geoscan Research FM36 gradiometers were used with a sampling grid density of

and the End of Ancient Egyptian Religion: A Regional Study of Religious Transformation (298–642 CE), *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 173 (Leuven, 2008); A. L. Gascoigne, "Dislocation and Continuity in Early Islamic Provincial Urban Centres: The Example of Tell Edfu," *MDAIK* 61 (2005): 153–89; J. Faiers with contributions from S. Clackson, B. Kemp, G. Pyke, and R. Reece, *Late Roman Pottery at Amarna and Related Studies*, Seventy-second Excavation Memoir (London, 2005); W. Smith, *Archaeobotanical Investigations of Agriculture at Late Antique Kom el-Nana (Tell el-Amarna)*, Seventieth Excavation Memoir (London, 2005); R. S. Bagnall, "Archaeological Work on Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, 1995–2000," *AJA* 105 (2001): 227–43.

4 Artur Buszek and Jakub Ordutowski also participated in this work as assistants to Herbich.

eight measurements per square meter (measurements every 0.25 m along traverses 0.5 m apart). The results are presented in figure 3 as gray-tone maps, with black corresponding to extreme positive values of the Earth's magnetic field and white to negative ones.

The mud brick used to build the monastic dwellings at John the Little generally demonstrates a low but detectable magnetic susceptibility, ranging from 0.06 to  $0.5 \times 10^{-3}$  SI.<sup>5</sup> Considering that the sandy environment in which these architectural remains are found has no magnetic properties whatsoever, the surveyor worked on the hypothesis that the mud brick, despite its low susceptibility, would show up due to sufficient contrast in the measurements. Especially darkened areas in the survey mark the presence of burned material—usually ovens used for cooking within kitchen-spaces, or in some cases possibly kilns for working with pottery, glass, and metal. The results of Herbich's survey exceeded our expectations, revealing a number of large monastic structures under the surface, including one around 85 meters in length (fig. 4), a structure similar in size to the main enclosure at the nearby Monastery of the Syrians in the Wādī al-Naṭrūn.

### Excavation of a Monastic Midden

As previously mentioned, this article will report only on excavation work conducted during our first season on site (7–27 June 2006). Given that that first season was only three weeks in duration, our goals for excavation were correspondingly modest. We deliberately decided not to begin excavation within any of the approximately eighty mounds currently visible at the site, but rather to use this time to examine a type of small surface anomaly found in several locations between the *akwām*. This type of anomaly consists of dense pottery scatter and typically does not, according to the geophysical readings, coincide with any discernable archaeological structures. We selected one anomaly approximately 305 meters south of the central church for excavation, equidistant from three significantly larger mounds that showed traces of walls and other architectural features at the surface. The areas of these three mounds range from 0.168 to 0.361 hectares (see fig. 1). Our goals were to answer the question of

5 Limestone, a material with virtually no magnetic properties, was also used in the construction of some of the larger buildings.

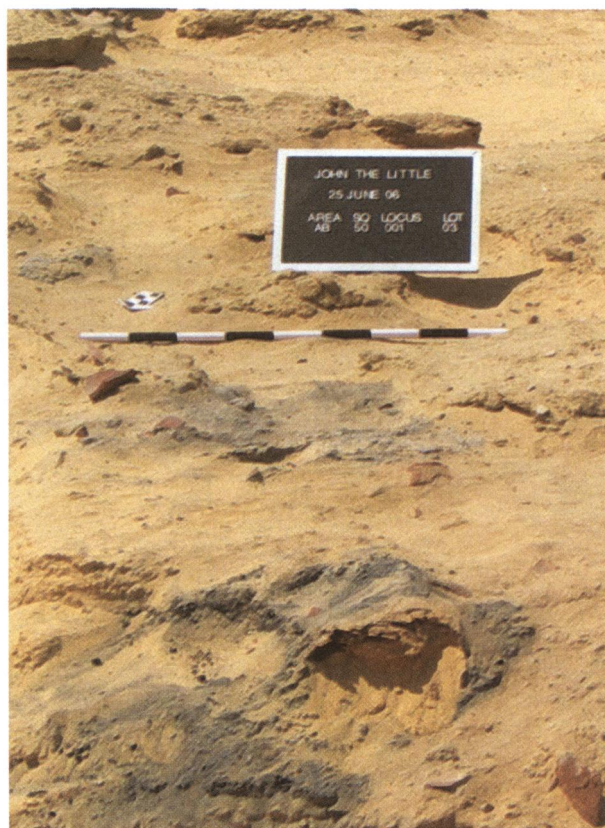


FIG. 5. Ashy deposits in AB50, view toward the south.

what natural or human processes created the surface anomalies and to explain the spatial configuration of these features in relation to clearly visible structures. By excavating parts of this surface disturbance, we hoped to gain insight into what features (architectural or otherwise) might be found in the area between the larger residences.

Four excavation units of 5 by 10 meters (50–53) constituted an area (AB) measuring 20 by 10 meters. Surface finds included pottery, glass, bone, plaster, architectural fragments, and metal. These types of items were consistent with other visible surface materials found across the site. A few fragments of plaster with a white skim bore traces of red *dipinti* (painted writings on the surface of the plaster), most likely Coptic letters. After the surface was cleared, ashy depressions appeared across the entire excavated area, but were especially concentrated in the easternmost units (50–52; see fig. 5). We determined that the uppermost ash deposits were probably of modern origin, although we recovered no diagnostic finds to help us date these fire pits (length

40 cm).<sup>6</sup> Once the surface deposits were documented and excavated, more ashy lenses appeared. It quickly became clear that these ash levels were consistent with the type of deposit created by the disposal of hearth clearings or food production refuse. The variation in elevations of the ash pockets across the units indicated that ashes and domestic refuse were deposited at different periods.

Continued excavation of the four units in area AB provided indisputable evidence that we were excavating a series of dump deposits (figs. 6 and 7). The midden included discarded wall and floor plaster, pottery, glass, metal, bones, and organic materials. Further exposure of the midden clarified the pattern of deposition across the area: the deposits in the southern quadrants were more recent, as they overlapped, in successive layers, earlier deeper deposits toward the north.

The excavation of the midden produced well-defined strata, all of which included the same types of materials. In particular, glass and plaster were found throughout, with moderate amounts of glass on the surface. Charcoal, ash, and bone were also found in all loci, but especially in the upper layers. The discard loci were very visible after the clearing of the hard-packed desert sand that had formed around each instance of disposal. By contrast, the discarded pottery was frequently found simply resting on layers of soft sand.

The pottery repertoire from the excavation of the midden, studied by Gillian Pyke, consisted of a range of Aswan and silt fine wares, coarse silt wares, and transport wares. The Egyptian fine wares, comprising a range of table vessels, and coarse wares, including cut-rim cookers, casseroles, lids, and lamps, are consistent with a domestic assemblage. This interpretation is supported by the presence of imported Aswan *sigillata* tablewares and their silt imitations, the latter of which is probably of local manufacture. The main transport ware was a bag-shaped jar, a type that is a consistent component of surface scatters throughout the area of the preliminary survey. The lack of transport wares associated with the late antique period may indicate that the assemblage dates to after the collapse of the Mediterranean trade network in which Egypt participated at this time. Based on the ceramic finds from these deposits, the ninth century can be proposed as a preliminary date for the midden.

6 The ash lenses typically measured between 1 and 1.5 cm in depth.



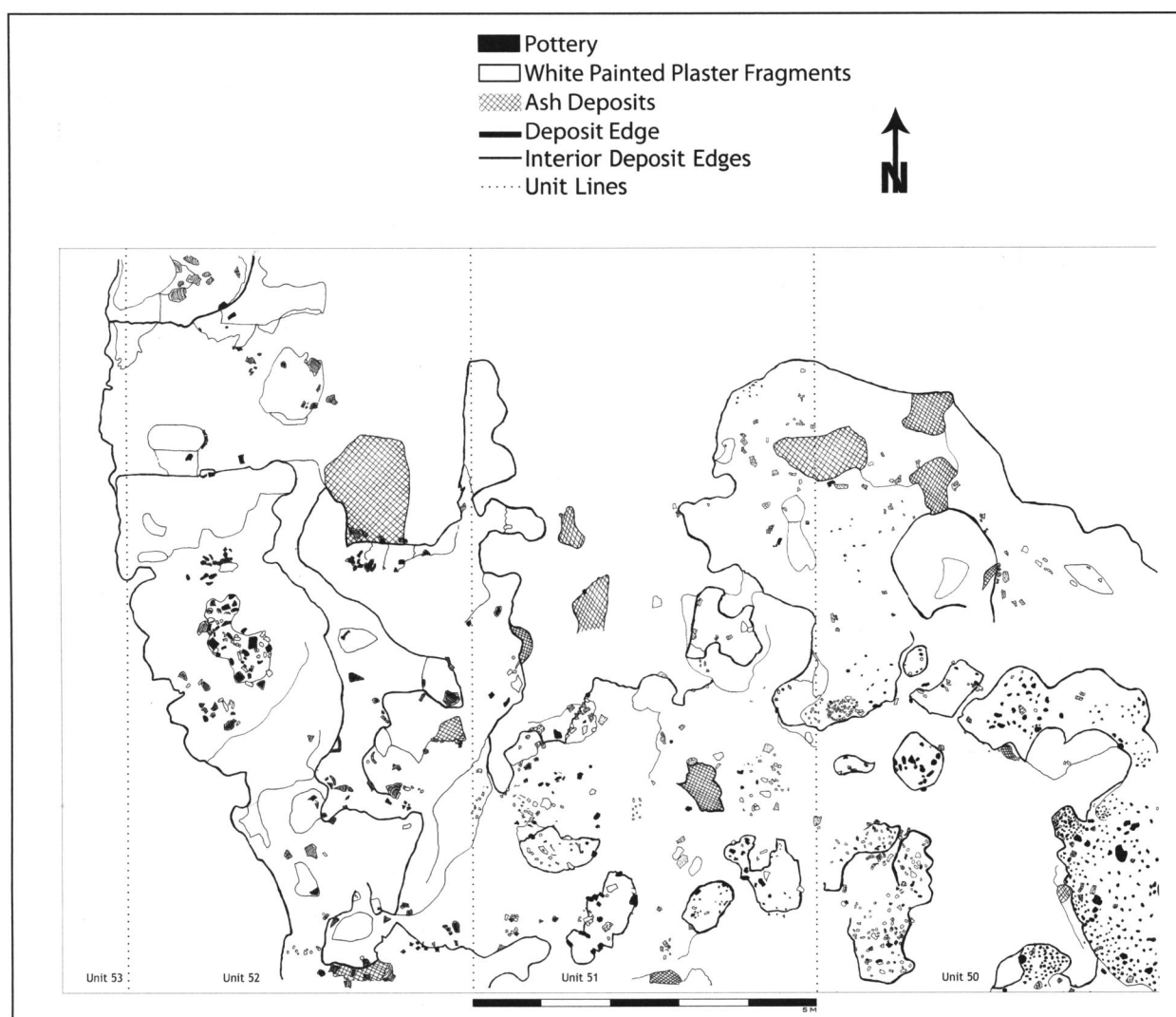


FIG. 6. Plan of midden deposit: excavation units 50–53 in area AB.

In addition to ceramics, the midden also yielded a significant quantity of architectural debris. This debris fell into two categories: (1) older construction materials removed and discarded in the course of renovation and (2) newer construction materials never installed, perhaps excess materials that turned out to be unnecessary for the completion of a project. The construction debris consisted of two types of materials: wall plaster and coarse flooring. The wall plaster is coated almost exclusively with a white skim, with signs of red, yellow, and brown paint on a few examples. The major deposits of this wall plaster were found in the south, clustered as if collected and then discarded as a group, rather than

scattered as if the plaster had fallen from a nearby wall. The plaster was accompanied by only a few mud bricks, further evidence that the plaster was deliberately collected for disposal. A few fragments with red *dipinti* markings provided evidence that some of the walls were inscribed. There is no indication that the wall plaster had suffered destruction due to fire or any other catastrophic event.

Among our other finds, bones (total 3.4 kg) were discovered primarily in or adjacent to ash deposits. Archaeozoologist Salima Ikram examined the bones from selected loci to create a taxonomy of species for the midden. The recovery of fish bones in this





FIG. 7. Overview of the midden, looking southeast across AB51 and AB52.

setting is consistent with analysis of food goods found at the monastic communities at Bawīt and Kūm al-Nānā (Amarna).<sup>7</sup> Specifically identified were species *Synodontis* sp., *Clarias* sp., *Lates niloticus*, *Bagrus bayad*, and *Barbus bynni*. It is noteworthy that all of these fish, save the *Lates*, are catfish or catfish-like and are found in irrigation ditches as well as the Nile, making it probable that they were easily fished in the area of Wādī al-Naṭrūn. After fish, pigs were the most prominent animal identified, followed by sheep and goats. The majority of pig bones that were identified came from portions that are often thrown away. This may indicate a prefer-

ence (or necessity) among local residents for consuming the least choice parts of the animal. It is also possible that more choice cuts were consumed here, but that the bones might have been disposed of elsewhere, or fed to dogs or other animals. In any case, this midden does not contain discarded bones from the more commonly consumed, choice portions. The discovery of fragments of a cuttlefish was particularly interesting since cuttlebones are usually found in tropical areas and around reefs. Its presence in the Wādī al-Naṭrūn area suggests it was brought to the site from the Mediterranean or Red Sea. Whether this cephalopod was for consumption or for another purpose, such as a medicinal one, cannot be determined at this time.

Marie-Dominique Nenna, glass specialist, catalogued and processed glass fragments ( $N = 2995$ ) from all four units of the midden. From this collection, diagnostic fragments ( $n = 386$ ) reflected a rich representation of vessels and architectural glass, most often from windows. All the pieces were free blown, except for eight that were mold blown. The vessel fragments numbered 170, while the architectural and glass fragments numbered 216.

The vessels were predominantly drinking glasses, with a few forms indicative of lamps and small containers. These objects were seldom decorated although we do have traces of incision, applied threads, pinching, and, in one example, the Arabic name of God, *Allah*, in tonged decoration. Pinched decoration, applied

7 For Amarna, see R. M. Luff and G. N. Bailey, "Analysis of Size Changes and Incremental Growth Structures in African Catfish *Synodontis schall* (schall) from Tell el-Amarna, Middle Egypt," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 27, no. 9 (2000): 821–35; eadem, "The Aquatic Basis of Ancient Civilizations: The Case of *Synodontis* Schall in the Nile Valley," in *Human Ecodynamics*, ed. G. Bailey, R. Charles, and N. Winder (Oxford, 2000), 100–113. For Bawīt, see S. Clackson, "Something Fishy in CPR XX," *APf* 45 (1999): 94–95; eadem, "Fish and Chits: The *Synodontis* Schall," *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 129, no. 1 (2002): 6–11; W. Van Neer, W. Wouters, M.-H. Rutschowskaya, et al., "Salted Fish Products from the Coptic Monastery at Bawīt, Egypt: Evidence from the Bones and Texts," in *The Role of Fish in Ancient Time*, ed. H. Hüster Plogmann (Rahden, 2007), 147–59; W. Van Neer and D. Depraetere, "Pickled Fish from the Egyptian Nile: Osteological Evidence from a Byzantine (Coptic) Context at Shanḥūr," *Revue de Paléobiologie* 10 (2005): 159–70; W. Van Neer et al., "The Roman Trade in Salted Nilotic Fish Products: Some Examples from Egypt," *Documenta Archaeobiologiae* 4 (2006): 173–88.

decoration, and mold-blown bowls with circles and hexagons are dated generally to the Abbasid period. Therefore these glass objects are consistent with a late eighth- to ninth-century date. Some fragments can be dated by comparative analysis: flasks with internal folded rims are attested throughout the eighth century and small biconical containers with attached circular bases are dated to the ninth century.

The architectural glass is more difficult to quantify. The 216 diagnostic fragments belong to windowpanes that were often quite large, but most of the shards recovered were very small. The three main types of architectural crown glass (or bull's-eye glass pane) found in the units are attested between the Umayyad and Fāṭimid periods.<sup>8</sup> The most common examples are of panes with infolded rims ( $n = 116$ ) and are made mainly of blue-green glass. The second most common group ( $n = 80$ ) consists of panes made with rounded rims in violet, emerald green, and deep blue glass, in addition to the more ubiquitous blue-green glass. These could be used either complete or cut into pieces. The third type is represented by small panes of deep blue, emerald green, and blue-green glass with a slightly infolded or rounded rim. Those in which the center is preserved bear a clear pontil mark on the upper side—that is, a mark indicating where the pontil rod was attached to the blown vessel. Their size is characteristic of a type of windowpane made in the seventh century. However, no other vessels or fragments support a seventh-century date within the glass finds. It is possible therefore that their presence attests to a later period of production for this type of glass. All the fragments are consistent with evidence of architectural glass found in other monastic contexts.<sup>9</sup>

The remaining finds are less numerous. Three highly corroded coins were collected, but they still need conservation and may be too corroded to be of use for numismatic analysis. Metals, such as copper alloy, iron, and slag, were not found in any significant quantity,

8 See *De transparentes spéculations: Vitres de l'Antiquité et du Haut Moyen Age (Occident-Orient)*, exh. cat. Musée/Site d'Archéologie (Bavay, 2005).

9 N. H. Henein, M. Wuttmann, *Kellia*, vol. 2, pt. 1, *L'ermitage copte QR 195: Archéologie et architecture* (Cairo, 2000), 114–19; M. Mossakowska-Gaubert, “Verres de l'époque byzantine—début de l'époque arabe (Ve–VIIIe siècle): Objets provenant des ermitages en Égypte,” in *Actes du 18e congrès de l'Association Internationale pour l'Histoire du Verre* (Thessalonique, 2009), forthcoming.



FIG. 8. Ceramic cross stamp from AB52 (locus 20, lot 2).

and only traces of eggshell, nuts, and resin were collected in the excavation of the midden. The most significant object outside of the daily recovery of plaster, pottery, and glass was a ceramic stamp in the shape of a cross (fig. 8). Such stamps were used for making impressions upon the holy bread used in Coptic monasteries and churches.

### Excavations in 2007, Subsequent Excavations, and Future Research Plans

In season two (May–June 2007), the YMAP team expanded the scope of its work by initiating excavations at one of the three associated monastic residences (*manshūbiyāt*) that form a triangle around the midden. Our decision to focus on one particular residential complex was strategic. It was determined that two of the buildings were too large (the largest measures 3,610 m<sup>2</sup>) to be investigated within a three- to five-year time period. Therefore, we selected the smallest (1,680 m<sup>2</sup>) of the three (B on fig. 1), with the goal of conducting a comprehensive examination of its structure, including its relationship both to the midden and to the other buildings in the immediate vicinity.

What we uncovered in 2007 was a well-preserved mud-brick complex containing extensive pottery finds, Coptic *dipinti* and wall paintings, and evidence for several phases of architectural modification and reuse. This work has continued in 2008, 2009, and 2010, and will serve as the basis for more detailed analysis in future publications. These excavations will not only shed light on the functional relationship between this residence and the adjacent midden but also constitute a case study for investigating the construction and renovation of local monastic architecture and the decoration of interior space. Did the residents of this building use the midden we excavated as the primary dumping ground for their daily refuse? Did they select the midden as a particularly convenient place to toss the smoldering remains of their cooking fires or to throw away unwanted building debris from damaged walls or small-scale renovation projects?

In upcoming seasons, in addition to continuing our work on this multiroom, mud-brick residence, we intend to open test trenches in the area between the building and the midden in order to identify other possible extramural features—such as footpaths, gardens, and additional refuse deposits—that might help us answer these and related questions about how early medieval monks in the Wādī al-Naṭrūn made use of their local topography.

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